

Smith & Sons: Reaching Toward the Future

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The Smith brothers planted these pines about 12 years ago.

Smith and Sons TREASURE Forest in Greene County demonstrates an extraordinary family tradition. Six generations of Abram Smith's descendants have lived on the property, managing it for optimum benefit for the family and to future generations.

While inheriting land and retaining family ownership through multiple generations is interesting and even admirable, it is far from unusual. So, what makes Smith and Sons so unique? Abram Smith was a slave who once worked the land for his owner.

In the mid-1800s, Abram was taken to Alabama from Virginia when Elem Smith pur-

chased him. As the now-named Abram Smith, he settled into the backbreaking work of a slave in the fields each day.

Abram shared the hope of most men in those times – having his own farm and working his own land. Abram, how-

ever, was an exceptional man who never lost sight of his dream. Following his owner's death, Abram Smith helped raise Elem's two sons. When the boys came of age, Abram was allowed to sharecrop, giving them a portion of his crops. After

a long, tiring day in the field, he managed to farm a plot of land at night – a helper held a lantern in the dark to provide enough light.

Over time, however, financial demands forced the sale of a portion of the land to someone outside the family. Despite Abram Smith's lack of freedom and opportunity, his night farming and sharecropping had allowed him to save a little money. He approached the new owner and was allowed to purchase 230 acres.



Smith and Sons: Andrew Smith, Sr. (front center) and his six sons: (left to right) Scott; Carl; Hodges; Andrew, Jr.; Bennie; and Jimmy all worked together in managing the farm.



This nesting turtle is one of many non-game species on the farm.



A black racer finds plenty to eat at Smith & Sons.



Plum trees and other mast trees help attract and maintain many species of wildlife on the property.

During his lifetime, Abram Smith farmed the Greene County land as a slave, a share-cropper, and finally as property owner. His family continued the farming tradition, row cropping the rolling hills until the early 1980s. When Andrew Smith, Abram's grandson, bought out the other heirs, they began to

manage the land more intensively for multiple benefits.

Andrew and his six sons, Andrew Jr., Jimmy, Bennie, Scott, Hodges, and Carl, incorporated the farm as "Smith and Sons" and work together in managing the property. Father and each of the sons are required to participate in the planning

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Bluebird boxes have been placed around the largest catfish pond.

and execution of all projects. Duties are assigned according to individual interests and talents. According to son Hodges, "We had always had a family business together; this was just another business."

Hodges, who is a ranger with the Alabama Forestry Commission, oversees the forestry aspect of the 356-acre tract. He prepared a written forest management plan in 1992 and worked with his brothers toward its implementation and TREASURE Forest certification. In 1995, Smith and Sons was awarded TREASURE Forest certification with timber production as their primary objective and wildlife management as the secondary objective. In the year 2000, they received statewide honor as the Northeast Region Winner of the Helene

Mosley Memorial TREASURE Forest Award.

All of the row crops are now gone. The old fields have been converted to pine trees either through natural regeneration or hand planting. The tree planting was, not surprisingly, a family effort as is the prescribed burning program implemented a few years ago.

Their commercial catfish ponds require frequent attention, and each brother plays a role in their upkeep. Deer hunting is a favorite pastime, so maintaining wildlife openings and planting food plots is another family project.

The Smith family generously shares their farm for forestry field tours and other educational events. Several years ago, they hosted small-acreage landown-

ers from nine West Alabama counties for a Saturday forestry tour. More than 50 people enjoyed the event, especially the first-hand accounts from the family members on the value of "sweat equity." When the whole family is involved, they say the burden is a little lighter and the rewards are even greater.

As their TREASURE Forest has grown, the Smiths have grown as a family as well. Andrew and his six sons worked side-by-side to build beautiful homes in a central area on the property. Today, three generations of Smiths enjoy the quiet, gently rolling hills around those homes for planting flowers, taking evening strolls, playing with children, and sharing the day's events.

Atop a knoll sits the family cemetery where Abram Smith's headstone rests, along with those of other family members. These serve as reminders of dedicated, hardworking people who, despite their harsh lives, envisioned a better day.

When Abram was farming by lantern light, did he imagine a day when his descendants would work the same land? Did he dare dream of his hard-earned land producing benefits for his family for more than 100 years? It is doubtful that anyone knows for sure, but we can be certain that Andrew Smith, his six sons, and their families are envisioning the future and sustaining the land for their descendants.

Across the road from the cemetery are young pine plantations where Abram's great-great-great grandchildren run and play, chasing fireflies and having fun. The children are reminders that, though rooted in the past, Smith and Sons are reaching toward the future. ☼



Abram Smith, along with other family members, is buried, in the Smith Cemetery on the property.

Memorial

Andrew Smith, Sr., age 82 of Eutaw, died May 11, 2002, shortly after this story was written. He is survived by his wife, Camilla Morrow Hardy Smith; daughter, Mamie Smith Coleman; sons, Andrew Smith, Jr., Bennie L. Smith, Carl E. Smith, Hodges Smith, Jimmy H. Smith, and W. Scott Smith; 12 grandchildren; and 6 great-grandchildren.